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Guest columnist

# Don't let melodrama distract from tragedy

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — The latest episode of spy vs. counterspy makes interesting theater, but all the sound and fury signifies nothing.

Even if our intelligence community were immune to manipulation, it could never contribute significantly to U.S. safety. This is because intelligence operations now take place within a system of world politics that is fatally flawed.

To survive into the future, the USA must learn that continuous tinkering with espionage does little more than fine tune our scenarios for extinction.

Without a major refashioning of U.S.-Soviet relations, spy activities offer only a temporary escape from consciousness, a romantic circus of illusions that diverts our attention from the planetary danger.

If we are to support our real private and national interests, we must fix our gaze upon the root cause of our insecurity, not upon its shadows.

Our task is to understand and implement the rhythms of cooperation between the superpowers. But before this can happen, the Reagan administration must abandon its quasi-religious fantasies of struggle between Good (us) and Evil (them). And it must abandon a strategy of arms control that is now transformed almost daily according to the sterile projections of pollsters and the vacant whims of phrase-makers.

The administration has reduced itself to a feeble speck of

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awareness comforted not by wisdom but by pantomime. Many in Washington do understand what is happening, but are usually not willing to speak the truth. Marionettes of power, they are the virtuous lackeys of "think tanks" and public authority, handmaidens of influence for whom integrity will always be unbearable.

Some thoughtful critics are willing to speak the truth. But they are not likely to be taken seriously. Ridiculed as idealists, their objections are dismissed out of hand. Even worse, their efforts to save us from annihilation elicit outrage and charges of disloyalty.

Problems exist, but they are not insurmountable. As the summit approaches, we can still learn to distinguish between melodrama, such as the Yurchenko affair, and tragedy. Grasping this distinction, we can persuade our leaders that foredoomed rivalry is a sordid and inauthentic creed.

If all of this sounds naive, it is because politics as usual — the politics of espionage and Cold War — can never succeed. To be sure, those who believe this administration can change its hopeless ways have little cause for optimism. But since such change offers the only chance for survival, they represent the only true realists.